proper symbol of Columbian endeavors, to the benefit of all mankind.

ONE-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF PESHTIGO, WIS., FIRE

Mr. PROXMIRE. Mr. President, this Friday, October 8, will be the 100th anniversary of the Peshtigo fire, the most disastrous conflagration in American history.

Ironically, the fire occurred the same night as the Chicago fire.

This week also happens to be Fire Prevention Week.

An account of the Peshtigo fire, published in the Milwaukee Journal of October 3, 1971, depicts the horror of fire. The writer, Robert W. Wells, was also the author of a book about the Peshtigo fire.

This weekend the town has planned a centennial commemoration of the fire. Church bells will toll and a memorial flame will be lighted at the mass grave where 350 identified victims have lain buried for a century.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Mr. Wells' account be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

PESHTIGO WAS ABLAZE 100 YEARS AGO

(By Robert W. Wells)

It will be 100 years next Friday since Peshtigo, Wis., was destroyed in the deadliest forest fire in American history.

From the standpoint of casualties, the conflagration that swept over the region north of Green Bay and burned extensive regions of the Door County peninsula outranks such better known disasters as the San Francisco earthquake and the Johnstown flood.

It killed four times as many persons as the great Chicago fire which, by coincidence, took place almost simultaneously with the one in the Wisconsin north country and diverted public attention from the greater tragedy 250 miles away.

Even in Wisconsin, it was several days before most residents realized that the spectacular fire in Chicago was merely the second worst to occur on Oct. 8, 1871.

Milwaukee firemen joined those from other cities in trying to save Chicago. In Peshtigo and other small communities hit by the forest fire, no professional firefighters from anywhere were on hand.

LINES BURN

The telegraph line linking Peshtigo with Green Bay had burned several weeks before in one of a series of smaller fires. Oct. 8 was a Sunday. Not until Wednesday did word of the disaster reach Madison.

By then, Gov. Lucius Fairchild and other state officials were in Chicago, planning Wisconsin's role in helping the victims there. When a plea for help arrived from the Peshtigo fire area, there was no one at the Capitol with authority to do a thing about it.

In 1871, even a governor's wife was supposed to know her place, and her place wasn't running the state. But with all the important men out of town, Mrs. Fairchild started issuing orders and a few hours after the wire came saying, "send help quick," she had a railway freight car of supplies on its way.

REFUGEES HUNGRY

The car had been intended for Chicago, but Mrs. Fairchild sent it north. The men had supposed that it was full, but what does a man know about packing things? The governor's lady and her friends converged on the freight yard in their carriages and stuffed blankets and quilts snatched from their beds into the car's nooks and crannies before it was allowed to depart.

The supplies from Madison and the help sent from such nearby communities as Green Bay and Marinette fed some of the hungry and clothed some of those who had lost everything they owned in the fire. Other refugees wandered through the stricken countryside, looking for potato or turnip patches so they could find food.

Even for those who lived through this unprecedented disaster, its extent was not fully realized until later. Early reports indicated that only a dozen or so had died.

Actually, the total was 100 times that. No exact count was possible. The best guess seems to be that about 600 persons died in Peshtigo itself—more than a third of its 1871 population—and about 250 more in the farming country near that community.

Another 200 or so died in isolated cabins, logging camps, trappers' huts and other places remote from statisticians in the 850 or more square miles which had been devastated.

Twenty-two more deaths occurred at Birch Creek, a small settlement in Upper Michigan which was near the northern limits of the fire. Another 100 or so died in Kewaunee and Door Counties.

SEVERAL FIRES

Many reference books list the toll at 1,500 dead. This is probably too high by two or three hundred, but even the most conservative estimates put the total number of dead well above the second place American fire—a 1904 disaster in New York's East River, when 1,034 persons were killed when an excursion steamer carrying Sunday school children burned.

For convenience, the Wisconsin disaster is called the Peshtigo fire. Actually, it was two and possibly three separate fires which burned simultaneously on both sides of the arm of Lake Michigan called Green Bay.

There were also several large forest fires in Michigan that same day. Luckily, they took place mostly in sparsely populated places, but hundreds of settlers fled and about 100 were killed.

The Michigan fires broke out in the daytime, one reason why the casualties there were lower. The Wisconsin fires arrived after many residents had gone to bed, catching them unaware.

The fact that the flames came sweeping in on a Sunday night instead of a weekday was also a factor. Sunday was the lumberjacks' day off, a time when the saloons and what were then called "whisky holes" did a brisk business.

By evening, a considerable percentage of the drinking men were in no shape to behave with clearheaded logic in trying to save themselves.

WEEKEND SPREE

A Peshtigo priest, Father P. Pernin, who wrote his account of the fire shortly after he'd lived through it, noted that while he was in the rectory yard burying churchly valuables a few hours before the community burned, the sounds of the usual weekend spree were heard from a nearby saloon.

Woods fires had been burning for several weeks, as they usually did in the fall. The season had been unusually dry and many of the residents worried about them, but except for volunteer firemen at the larger settlements there were no facilities for fighting such dangers.

It was hoped that rain would come in time. As it happened, the first October shower arrived one day too late.

Communications depended on horses and the great fire had ended before residents of Green Bay realized that 850 square miles of timber had been burned to the north and northeast, starting only a few miles from that city's downtown.

NONE KILLED

A prominent local resident named George W. Watson brought first word of the disaster, arriving home in his buggy from a Kewaunee County settlement called New Franken, 12 miles away. That community had been wiped out, he reported, and the fire had swept on north toward Door County.

None of New Franken's 80 residents had been killed, although every building was razed. Farther up the peninsula, residents had been less lucky.

The eastern wing of the fire extended to the arm of the lake called Sturgeon Bay. The Belgian settlement at Rosiere reported 44 dead, Forestville was also hard hit and a settlement called Williamsonville or Williamson's Mill in the Town of Gardner was totally destroyed.

Like other reports that followed that confusing night of Oct. 8, the casualty statistics for Williamsonville vary with the source. Thomas Williamson, one of the brothers who ran a shingle mill at the community, seems to be the most reliable authority.

He listed 59 dead by name. Some were his relatives. The others were his friends. Only 17 of the settlement's residents survived, he said, including just four of 15 women and two of 16 children.

About half of the residents followed the lead of Frank McAdams, the settlement's blacksmith, and sought refuge in a small hollow next to a fallen tree. All 35 of them died, huddled together in a space about 15 feet square.

"Apparently the men had circled outside to afford slight protection to the women," one of those who visited the scene the next morning reported. "Next to the group and fallen outside lay the blacksmith, holding a fragment of burnt shawl over the face of his little girl. Two feet from him lay his wife with her two little ones nestled beside her.

"Maggie Williamson lay a step from the rest, with a handful of curling black hair which she had torn from her head. Maggie was beautiful as she lay. Her betrothed had stood by her side, fleeing only after she had sunk to the ground.

"Maggie O'Neil, her rosy cheeked cousin, could only be recognized by pieces of jewelry in her hands, which had been given her by her lover."

The fire which moved north along the west side of the bay began in the town of Pittsfield just north of Green Bay, damaged Suamico, threatened Oconto, Marinette and Menominee and extensively damaged Menekaune, a community which has since become part of Marinette, with two wings of the conflagration continuing north into Michigan.

SAVED ON SCHOONER

At Menekaune, the losses included 35 houses, 10 barns, two hotels, three stores, three mills and a woodenware factory, but not a single life. Thanks to a short temper and a handspike, a shipyard owner named S. V. D. Philbrook deserves much of the credit for the lack of casualties.

A small schooner, the Stella, was tied up in the shipyard awaiting repairs when the fire approached. Several dozen Menekaune men outran the other refugees and jumped aboard the ship, whipping out jack-knives to cut it loose.

Philbrook yelled at them to wait for the others. They ignored him. He grabbed the handspike. The first man to cut the lines would get it across the head, he promised.

Deciding that the danger from the shipyard owner was more immediate than the peril from the fire, the men put their knives away until the settlement's women and children got aboard. Only after the ropes began to smoke did Philbrook lay down the handspike and permit the schooner to be cut free.

VARY IN INTENSITY

The wind that was driving the fire northward sent the ship out into the Menominee River, where it grounded on a sandbar, safe from the flames.

The fires which swept through the Wisconsin forests varied in intensity. The worst seems to have begun about six miles north of Oconto and headed directly for the village of Peshtigo and an area then called the Upper, Lower and Middle Sugar Bush.

What was then the Lower Sugar Bush begins about two miles west and a little south of Peshtigo. To the north of the Lower Bush and a little northeast of Peshtigo is Harmony, located in what was the Middle Sugar Bush. North of this, across the Peshtigo River, is Porterfield, a small community in what was the Upper Sugar Bush.

Contemporary accounts differ on how many bodies were found in the Sugar Bush farming area after the fire—one says 267, another 255. The reports agree that about half of the casualties came in the Lower Sugar Bush.

Twenty families in that region were killed without a single survivor to mourn for them. One mother lived through the fire with her young daughter but before rescuers found them the child had died of starvation in what had become a blackened waste.

FATHER KILLS CHILDREN

One father killed his children to save them from the flames, then turned the knife on himself. The single survivor of another farm family killed himself, apparently after discovering that his parents and two brothers had died.

One farmer, Henry Bateman, saved himself, his wife, their six children and eight neighbor children by herding them into a plowed field, scooping dirt over the others, then over himself.

A few settlers managed to save their homes. Abraham Place, a Vermonter who had married a Menominee Indian girl, had formed a barrier of plowed land all around his house and with the help of his sons and numerous in-laws kept the building from burning, later opening it to more than 100 refugees.

Reuben Slattery, a logging contractor, had a crew of lumberjacks to help form a bucket brigade. His house was another of the rare buildings which stayed intact.

In Peshtigo itself, the only wooden structure to survive the fire was a portion of a partially completed home. A shanty just outside the village also was spared and gave shelter to at least one of the women who gave birth to babies that night while the community was burning around them.

Most of those who survived saved themselves by standing in the river, which divides the town. Others found refuge in a low lying, swampy area called "the Flats."

The glow of the approaching forest fire was visible about 9:30 p.m., but the worst of it did not hit the village until 10. The western half of Peshtigo felt the fiery blast first and many of the residents started across the river's single bridge, located where Highway 41 now crosses the stream.

The east bank's residents were soon trying to get to the west bank, along with horses, cows and other livestock, while the west siders were pushing the other way. This caused a considerable traffic jam which was resolved when the bridge started to burn.

The Peshtigo Co.'s wooden boarding house, three stories tall, was the largest building on the east side, aside from the mill and woodenware factory. Most of 50 Norwegian men who had arrived in Peshtigo only a few hours before were there and numerous local residents sought refuge inside, among them the wife and nine children of Donald R. McDonald, the factory superintendent.

"Stay here, no matter what happens," McDonald told his wife, then hurried off to fight the fire.

Mrs. McDonald obeyed. She and the children perished, along with everyone else in the boarding house. No one could tell how many died there. All that remained the next morning was ashes and a few fragments of bodies.

Those who got to the river were generally able to survive, although some drowned. One girl, Carrie Heidenworth, got beyond her depth. As she went under, the 5 year old reached out in panic just as a cow went swimming past.

Carrie clung to one horn and was pulled along. The cow eventually got close enough to shore so a man grabbed the girl and pulled her to safety.

WIFE LOST

One man was pulling his wife along toward the river when he lost his grip on her arm. In the darkness and confusion, he stopped long enough to find her, then made his way to the water. Only after he got there did he look again at the woman he had saved.

"You're not my wife," he said. "I've saved the wrong woman."

By then, his wife was dead. A former prizefighter, John Mulligan, boss of the North Western Road crew that was extending the railroad toward Peshtigo, had better luck.

He put his wife on his back and ran for the river, going through the smoke and flames, one admirer reported, "like a quarter horse." Mrs. Mulligan, clad in her nightgown, snatched up a shawl on the way out of the house and by the time they got to the river, the gown was burned off and only a single remnant of the shawl was left.

Mulligan felt this was no time for false modesty. Once they were safely in the water, he held up the tattered shawl in triumph.

MESSAGE TO MARINETTE

It was Mulligan who carried the word of Peshtigo's disaster to Marinette. He sought out Isaac Stephenson, a lumber baron who became a senator, and asked politely if he could get some food to Peshtigo.

Ike Stephenson had been too busy fighting the fire at Marinette to give thought to what had happened elsewhere.

"Why, what is the matter at Peshtigo?" he asked Mulligan.

"My God, don't you know? Not a stick of the village is standing."

Stephenson dashed off a telegram to Gov. Fairchild, entrusting it to the captain of a lake steamer who promised to send it when he got to Green Bay. He sent word to fellow lumbermen to get supplies rolling toward Peshtigo, then arranged to have the Dunlap House converted into a temporary hospital before heading south to see for himself.

Stephenson saw that Mulligan had not exaggerated. It looked as if a tornado of fire had swept through the village, wiping it off the face of the earth.

It now seems likely that Peshtigo's disaster was a small scale replica of the World War II fire storms which destroyed much of Dresden and Tokyo after incendiary bombing raids.

The United States Forest Service has noted that such fire storms can occur in a forest fire and that "everything combustible within the fire storm zone is completely consumed."

The death toll in the 1871 fire was higher than in other huge forest fires because a large number of people happened to be in exactly the wrong place when the fire storm occurred. Except for the river, the number of casualties at Peshtigo might have been twice as large.

Some bodies were completely burned up. All that was found of several Swedes who had collapsed while digging a ditch to try to stop the fire was the metal parts of their shovels. A man who saw a girl named Helga Rockstad crumble to the ground as she was trying to reach the river went back to the spot the next morning to look for her body. Nothing was left but two nickel plated garter buckles and a small mound of ashes.

Entire families disappeared on some of the farms. It was assumed that they had died, but there was no way of telling for certain.

Lumberjacks who had been in the woods when the fire came were never seen again by their friends, but who could say whether they had died or simply decided they'd had enough of that part of the countryside and wandered on?

NO EXACT COUNT

As a result of such uncertainties, any exact count of the number of dead was impossible. Even the statistics on the number of homeless left by the fire are unreliable—one estimate was 5,000 families, but it was no more than a guess.

No one suggested that the federal government help the fire victims, but the Army voluntarily dispatched blankets, clothing and 200,000 rations of hard bread, bacon and beans. The state raised a total of $141,568.49, much of it from private contributions which came from as far away as Peru.

Relief committees were established in Milwaukee and Green Bay as well as in several smaller Wisconsin cities. Smallpox broke out shortly after the fire and was blamed on contributions of infected clothing.

One of the first buildings put up at Peshtigo after the fire was converted into an isolation hospital, with a man who had previously recovered from smallpox in charge. About the only medicine available for the patients was whisky. Those who recovered gave it full credit.

Peshtigo had been largely a company town and the Peshtigo Co.'s decision to rebuild it despite a $1.1 million loss gave the survivors work and made certain that the village would rise from its ashes.

The morning after the fire, supplies had been so scarce that a vigilante committee which wanted to hang a looter had to let him go because there wasn't a rope within miles. Within a week, however, some of the homeowners were busily putting up new quarters and complaining that all this talk about the fire was hard on real estate values.

Most of the new houses were built in the same locations as the old. The streets kept their old names. The new bridge was erected on the site of its vanished predecessor.

Before 1871 ended, the Marinette Eagle noted that "whisky holes are getting thick again" in Peshtigo and "many of them are an intolerable nuisance.

Interest in the fire was revived briefly in 1901 when a body was discovered in a swamp in the Town of Porterfield. It was assumed that the man had died while fleeing the flames in 1871.

Seeing an opportunity to make a buck, a nearby resident charged admission to see the last victim of the Peshtigo fire. Business was so slow, however, that he soon abandoned the enterprise and let the memory of Wisconsin's worst disaster sink back into the foggy haze of distant history.

BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE TO SENATOR ELLENDER

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, it is a distinct honor for me to join with my colleagues in paying tribute to our President pro tempore on his 81st birthday.

ALLEN J. ELLENDER has served in this body longer than any of us—35 years by January 1972; however, he warrants tribute for his present contributions to his State and country as well as for his